

Walk Twenty-Six: Portbury Wharf and Portishead Marina

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Portishead may not have the most exciting reputation, but it is a town with a lot to offer for visitors. Situated on the Severn Estuary coast, Portishead boasts a traditional high street, the Lake Grounds (a large coastal recreation ground), an open air pool, a coast path running all the way to Clevedon, a wetland nature reserve and an enormous marina surrounded by attractive modern houses and flats.

This walk is concerned with the latter two features; beginning in the Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve, the route follows paths and boardwalks until it reaches the modern housing development of Port Marine. In stark contrast to its green beginnings, the walk then tours the ultra-modern environs of the marina, which feels like North Somerset's answer to Monte Carlo, before returning through the nature reserve.

A stroll around this lovely route should brighten anyone's day, thanks to its combination of big skies and water with a hefty dose of civilisation too.

An optional extension to the route comprises a walk through the woods to Battery Point, with onward connections to Walk Twenty-Seven 'The Portishead Coast Path'.

Useful Information

Terrain: Largely flat.

Ground: Largely paved or metalled.

Key Attractions: Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve, Portishead Ecology Park, Portishead Quays Marina, RNLI lifeboat station, Battery Point (via optional extension).

Refreshments: Restaurants and food stores available at Portishead Quays Marina

Starting point: Wharf Lane parking area, Sheepway, near Portishead.

Getting there: Sheepway is served by local buses running between Bristol and Portishead; bus stops at Wharf Lane junction. Free car parking available at Wharf Lane

parking area or nearby Sheepway parking area.

Approx. Time: 2 hours

Approx. Distance: 3.7 miles

The Route

Our route starts at the small parking area at the southern Wharf Lane entrance to Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve. If this parking area is full, there is alternative provision at the nearby Sheepway parking area, allowing you to join the walk at the entrance to Portishead Ecology Park (2).

Begin by going through the gates onto the metalled footpath and bridleway, heading west.

As you walk alongside the first field, the hillside houses of the upper part of Portishead can be seen in the distance (1).



Entering Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve

This part of **Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve** lacks the wetland and saltmarsh habitats that you will see later in this walk. Instead, it has the character of farmland, being surrounded by fields.

After a double corner, you will find yourself passing a field on your left. At the far corner of the field you can see the arched stone bridge where Sheepway crosses the old Portishead railway line (2). It is hoped that the line will be reopened to passenger services within the next few years. Until then, Portishead remains one of the largest towns in Britain that does not have a railway station.



The railway bridge at Sheepway

The path will eventually lead you to a junction of several paths. The first turning, the grassy path hard to the right, runs around the perimeter of the nature reserve. It is not included as part of this circuit, but is worth exploring in your own time; note that it can get muddy underfoot.

Continue to the end of the metalled path and turn right onto a tarmac path, passing through a gate (3).



Entering Portishead Ecology Park

You have now entered **Portishead Ecology Park**, a wetland habitat which makes the perfect partner for Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve, as well as helping to provide natural drainage for this flood-prone area. The area is rich with wildflowers and wetland plants. To begin with, you will pass a tall birch tree and then pass below high tension power lines heading for the nearby electrical sub-station.

After this, the area becomes more open. You will cross an attractive boardwalk surrounded by bulrushes (4). On raised ground to the right you can see the modern housing of Port

Marine in pastel shades. Off left is a more conservative housing estate in red brick.



The boardwalk at Portishead Ecology Park

After crossing the boardwalk, don't get pulled off onto the path to the left. Take the right fork to continue towards Port Marine (5).

You will soon pass an attractive retention pond providing drainage for the new houses.



Passing the retention pond

Beyond the pond, the path curves and climbs gently up until it is level with and parallel with a street called The Finches.

When the path you are on is about to head in amongst the buildings, turn right instead into the next part of The Finches (6).

The Finches – most of the streets here are named after birds – leads you through a part of Port Marine where the houses designed on quasi-traditional lines, although the illusion is shattered slightly by the numerous parking courts. The landscaped front gardens ensure that the environment is, overall, green and pleasant.

Eventually you will reach **Phoenix Park**, a tree-lined open space in the heart of the residential development. **Phoenix Way**, the main spine road of the development, passes along the far side of the space.



Phoenix Park, Port Marine

Turn right into Phoenix Way (7) and then immediately left into Curlew Place.

Curlew Place is a narrower, mews-type street that meanders between slightly more modern style houses.

Immediately after passing a small green space at the end of Teal Way, bear right onto a footpath (8) as Curlew Place itself turns left.



Bear right onto the footpath at Curlew Place

The footpath will return you to **Phoenix Way** next to another small green space that forms a sort of civic square.

Bear left to follow Phoenix Way towards the marina (9).

This final section of Phoenix Way is among the most modern in design. A pair of steel sculptures announce your arrival at the **Schweich Bridge**, named after Portishead's twin town in Germany. The Schweich Bridge spans The Rhyne, an historic drainage channel that predates the modern development of this area.



View of The Rhyne from the Schweich Bridge

Continue along Phoenix Way until it ends at Newfoundland Way. Cross the road and cut through Mizzzen Court (10) to reach Portishead Quays Marina.

Portishead Quays Marina is the architectural centrepiece of Port Marine. In contrast to the mannered houses of the more suburban streets, the blocks of flats that line the marina soar to eight or nine storeys in height. The marina is also surrounded by pocket parks and public art, as you will see as you walk around it. Comparisons to Monte Carlo are obviously tongue-in-cheek, but the forests of masts from the many boats that are moored in the marina still provide a slight echo of it.



Arriving at Portishead Quays Marina

Shortcut Route

The main route includes a full circuit of the marina but, if you don't want to walk that far, or if you would like to cross the marina quickly to reach the Battery Point route extension, turn right along the quayside.

Follow the quayside round an inlet, passing a supermarket and a restaurant, to reach the lock gates. Cross the inner lock gate to rejoin the main route at Lockside (13).

▲▲ There are various places to eat or drink around the marina, including to either side of the lock gates, at Chandlery Square and a cluster at the inland end which extends onto Harbour Road. Food shops are also available.

If you are following the main route, turn left along the quayside and walk around the marina in a clockwise direction.

You will start by heading towards the inland end of the marina, where one of the most unashamedly modern apartment blocks can be seen in the distance.

You will have to detour briefly away from the quayside when you reach **Chandlery Square (11)**. Otherwise, you can stay at the water's edge.



Modern buildings at the inland end of the marina

At the southern end of the marina you will find an open section of water with no moorings. This is a good spot from which to view the full length of the marina, which is truly impressive in its scale.

Make your way around the inland end of the marina and walk back up the far side.

You will pass a green area next to the **Parish Wharf Leisure Centre (12)**. This seems to be a popular spot for people to feed the wildfowl that sometimes visit the marina.

Continue past the back of Portishead Primary School until you are passing houses again.



Houses on the northwest side of the marina

Enjoy the walk back up the northwest side, which offers some of the best views of the numerous boats and the backdrop of modern buildings. Look out for sculptures in the pocket parks on the left.

After a while, a road joins the quayside at **Lockside**. You will find yourself approaching

the **lock gates (13)**. The **shortcut route** rejoins the main route here.



Approaching the lock gates

Continue past the inner lock gates and climb the ramp to the level of the outer lock gates.

The lock gates are one of the best spots from which to appreciate the engineering that must have gone into building the marina, particularly at low tide. The Severn Estuary has the second highest tidal range in the world, making Portishead Quays Marina a true deep water harbour with incredibly high walls.

Descend the ramp ahead of you to reach a lower area of quayside. Continue straight on.

As you pass the lock entrance, with its red and green navigational beacons, the view over the Severn Estuary opens right out. You will have a fine view of Bristol Port, with its wind turbines, and the distant Severn Bridges.



A car carrier being guided into Bristol Port

Beyond this point, the modern buildings that surround most of the marina give way to **The Barbican**, an unusual residential development

that is said to be inspired by Cornish fishing villages. In reality, it's a long way from that sort of character, but we will take a better look at it shortly.

Continue to the end of the quayside.

You will find yourself at the gated entrance to Portishead Pier (**14**), which is reserved for licensed anglers. The modernisation and sanitisation of Portishead Quays Marina seems to have passed this structure by completely, giving it a pleasingly dilapidated appearance in relation to its surroundings.

*Turn left and continue until you reach a smart concrete slipway (**15**).*

You have reached the **RNLI Lifeboat Station**. This highly modern facility is equipped with a small gift shop. The quiet setting affords good views across the estuary to Wales. You can also access the stony shore here if you'd like to connect with the water, but watch out for the sticky river mud.



View of the Severn Estuary

▲▲ By climbing the steps beyond the lifeboat station you can reach The Royal Inn, a popular spot for food and drink due to its unbeatable location with a large garden overlooking the water.

At this point we will begin heading back towards Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve, unless you are attempting the Battery Point route extension.

Battery Point route extension

If you would like to make this a slightly longer walk, or to connect through to Walk 27 'The Portishead Coast Path', then you can follow this attractive route extension with a very different feel to the main route. Please note that the extension is not accessible and includes several flights of steep steps.

Begin by climbing the steps just beyond the lifeboat station to reach a road at the entrance to the Royal Inn.

Climb the steep little road until you reach a junction. Bear gently left onto **Pier Road** (not the cul-de-sac section).

After a few metres, roughly opposite the start of the terraced houses, turn right onto a flight of steps (**15A**).

The steep steps will lead you up into the woodland of **Eastwood and Battery Point Local Nature Reserve**. Follow the main path, avoiding side turnings, as it descends gently through the woods. Eventually you will descend another flight of steps which, after crossing Woodlands Road, will deposit you on **Battery Point**.

Battery Point is an excellent spot from which to appreciate the views down the Severn Estuary towards south Wales and the islands of Flat Holm and Steep Holm. The area is also home to an unusual, small square lighthouse and Portishead's open air swimming pool.

The steps just beyond the back of the swimming pool lead down to Esplanade Road, home of Portishead's pleasant Lake Grounds and the starting point of Walk 27.

When you're ready to return to the marina, make your way back up Battery Point and this time take the path that leads into the woods from the left hand side of the open space (**15B**). This will lead you to **Woodlands Road**.

Quiet Woodlands Road allows you to return to the marina without climbing right to the top of the hill. It also provides pleasant views out over the estuary and is home to a number of interesting and impressive residential properties.

Returning eventually to the Royal Inn, go back down the steps to return to the lifeboat station (**15**) and continue the main route.

When you're ready to move on, climb the short flight of steps opposite the slipway to reach Eastcliff, the road around the edge of The Barbican. Go straight on, through a small gap between the buildings, to enter the internal courtyards of The Barbican.



Enter The Barbican

The interior courtyards of The Barbican are all odd angles and shadowy corners. However, there is a fairly clear path through the middle. The mix of timber, render and slate with white and pastel blues reflects the development's traditional inspiration.

Make your way to the far end of the Barbican development. As you approach the far end, bear left to emerge back onto Eastcliff by the quayside.

*Make your way back to the lock and cross the outer lock gates to reach the southeast side (**16**). Turn left and descend the ramp to the quayside.*



A boat emerges from the lock

The quayside to the southeast side of the lock entrance, backed by a tall block of modern flats, provides a good view back across to the Barbican and is home to some more interesting public art.



On the southeast quayside

Follow the quayside around the corner so that you reach a wide path on the seaward side of the flats.

You will quickly reach a marginal area where The Rhyne emerges into the Severn Estuary. The saltmarsh vegetation combined with the remains of old dockside structures and the distant industrial backdrop of Bristol Port make for a characterful scene.

Continue along the path until you have crossed the end of The Rhyne (17).



Looking back towards The Barbican and Portishead Pier from The Rhyne

At this point there is a choice of two routes to return to Portbury Wharf.

Dry weather route

If you would like to stay closer to the water, you can walk straight along the sea defences to return to the nature reserve. This route may be muddy during wet weather.

To take this option, turn left onto a metalled path to the right of The Rhyne. This will take you down to a gap in a palisade fence leading out into the saltmarsh area.

Go through the gap in the fence, then turn right and walk along the top of the sea defence embankment. After a while you will reach a very obvious right turning leading down onto a long straight track (17A).

Take this turning and follow it along the track, which runs next to another small rhine. You have now returned to **Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve**. Wooden gates to the left of the track lead to two **bird hides**, of which the second is closest to the reserve's ponds, where you can find a variety of wildfowl.

Rejoin the all-weather route at the end of the straight track, where the track from Wharf Lane crosses from the left (19).



The start of the dry weather route along the sea defences

To continue on the all-weather route instead, carry on along the paved coastal path.

Passing some more public art, you will find yourself on a pleasant promenade in front of some more of the modern flats. This path borders the **Portbury Wharf Nature Reserve** to the left, and is one of the places from which you may see some of its smaller birds.



The all-weather route runs in front of the flats

At length, the paved section of the path ends as you reach the last of the housing and re-enter the nature reserve itself. You will be enveloped in the shrubs that line this section. You are close to a major electrical sub-station at this point, and will probably hear it humming off to the right.



Returning through the nature reserve

When the path splits, bear right and follow the path down into a right hand corner (the left fork is a dead end) (18).

Passing under the power lines leading to the sub-station, you will soon descend to a gate which leads out onto the end of the track that comes down from Wharf Lane (19). The **dry-weather route** rejoins here via the long straight track to the left.



Looking back up the dry weather route towards the estuary

You may wish to detour briefly back up the dry-weather route to visit the nearest **bird hide**, which is closest to the nature reserve's

ponds, where you can find a variety of wildfowl.

When you're done here, set out along the track that leads towards Wharf Lane.

The track winds between native trees and hedgerows, passing one final **bird hide** on the right.

At length, after a gentle climb, you will reach a gate and emerge next to agricultural buildings at the end of **Wharf Lane (20)**. Please note that this area can sometimes flood after very wet weather.



Tree-lined Wharf Lane

From this point on, it's a simple matter of following the tree-lined Wharf Lane until you return to the parking area and complete Walk Twenty-Six.

Coming Up

In Walk Twenty-Seven '*The Portishead Coast Path*' we will explore the diverse and coast path between Portishead's Lake Grounds and Redcliffe Bay, which is about a third of the way to Clevedon. Big skies, estuary views and stony shores abound.

Mike's Bristol Walks
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